GENERAL QUESTION

Documenting ephemeral art

As moving image installations are ephemeral in presentation, art historians depend on their documentations; for example a photographic installation shot (fig. 1). This creates a tenuous situation for moving image installations as in these secondary sources the indispensable qualities of the installations such as duration, sound, spatial relations, and visitor movements get lost. By documenting ephemeral art, the art projects are de-contextualized and transferred to media and alphas that are different from the exhibition and new meanings evolve. Is there a way to document moving image installations by preserving their core qualities and meaning in the documentation?

REFERENCES


MY QUESTION

Feedback on artists’ documentation

In my research I look at the tenuous situation of documenting ephemeral art from the artist’s perspective. My analysis of moving image installations from the 1960s until today reveals that the production and documentation of these installations increasingly merges; the artwork becomes the documentation and vice versa. Although still being de-contextualized and transferred to another medium and alphas, documentations by artists preserve the indispensable qualities of a moving image installation and its core meaning.

CONCLUSION

In Rivers’ artistic approach of documenting Slow Action the four versions embody the epistemic status of both, presentation and documentation. By making use of primary material only, Rivers preserves the indispensable qualities of the installation and takes into account the genuine relation between the moving images, the space, and the visitors/users. Each version is adapted to the core structure of Slow Action according to its medium and alphas.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Along with Slow Action further installations are relevant for my analysis of various types of artistic documentation of moving image installations, amongst them Slow Action (2001/02) by Julian Rosefeldt, Unwohnzimmer (2007) by Doug Aitken, and When is It Ever (2008) by Eija-Liisa Ahtila. These case studies are part of my doctoral dissertation and currently sub-project 1 in the research project “At the limits of the archive”. My dissertation deals with the aesthetic and epistemic diversity in documentations of moving image installations. Documentations applied in the art historical discourse are analyzed and compared to those produced in the artistic and popular-scientific domain. By making accessible the artistic and popular-scientific documentations, I put emphasis on recognizing the transformative gestures such as re-editing and re-staging. This enables to preserve the structure and core qualities of moving image installations in their documentation.